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No 'external hand' behind latest amendment: Dar

• Insists proposed 27th Amendment to be tabled 'soon', won't be rushed • Says bill may originate in Senate instead of NA • Stresses govt will consult allies as opposition warns of 'constitutional crisis' • PTI's Ali Zafar brands move a 'conspiracy', claims devolution at risk • Upper house passes Asaan Karobar Bill, extends Virtual Assets Ordinance by 120 days

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: As the opposition in the Senate raised alarm over the proposed 27th constitutional amendment, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar on Tuesday confirmed the bill would be brought before parliament "soon" but insisted it would not be rushed and denied "external hand" in the amendment.

"We will try to present it in accordance with the Constitution. I assure this will not be put to a vote in a flash," he told the upper house while responding to PTI parliamentary leader Barrister Syed Ali Zafar.

PPP stalwarts wary of 27th Amendment: Page 3

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Mr Dar's remarks came amid a sustained protest by opposition senators over the delay in appointing the leader of the opposition. He said that after the PPP, the government would take all allies on board, including the MQM, ANP, IPP and BAP. "A standard process is being followed," he said.

The deputy prime minister noted that such amendments typically originate in the National Assembly, but added that if senators wished to see the draft first, he could request that the bill be moved in the Senate.

Brushing aside suggestions that the amendment was coming from "somewhere else", he said it was being brought by the government. He also supported the opposition's demand for the immediate appointment of the opposition leader, but said the Senate chairman was supposed to satisfy himself on who commanded a majority.

'Conspiracy against Constitution'

Earlier, PTI's Ali Zafar termed the forthcoming 27th Amendment a "conspiracy against the Constitution".

He said key ministers in television appearances he had taken part in had claimed there was no such amendment in the works.

"This only means either they were telling a lie or were unaware of it. In both cases, it means that someone else is drafting the 27th Amendment for them," he said, warning that an imminent constitutional crisis had effectively been announced and must be taken up by the Senate.

"Constitutions are not murdered by bullets, but by mala fide amendments made under the guise of reform," Mr Zafar said.

Calling the Constitution a sacred document, he recalled that on April 10, 1973, when the Constitution was adopted, the then prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto declared that it was "the Constitution of the people of Pakistan, not of one man or one party".

He said dictators had distorted the 1973 document over the next 37 years, until parliament passed the 18th Amendment in April 2010, restoring the democratic spirit of the Constitution, reviving the parliamentary form of government, strengthening provincial autonomy and safeguarding the independence of the judiciary and the Election Commission.

However, he warned that the proposed 27th Amendment threatened to undo those gains.

The senator alleged it

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NEW YORK CITY: Democratic mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani and his wife Rama Duwaji cast their votes at the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts in Queens.—AFP

'Opponents' continue to serve under AJK PM

PPP law minister defends use of official perks, says they can be availed until vote of confidence

By Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: Even as efforts to unseat Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq remain stalled over the choice of his successor, the same ministers leading the revolt continue to serve under him — a paradox that has turned Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) into a spectacle of irony and political confusion.

The PPP and PML-N, in separate meetings, had earlier decided to part ways with the coalition government and sought approval from their respective leaderships to withdraw ahead of the upcoming general elections.

After several rounds of deliberations and shifting positions, the PML-N eventually announced it would support the PPP in forming its own government but would not accept any share in the new set-up.

Meanwhile, a series of meetings of PPP legislators and senior leaders were held in Karachi and Islamabad to chalk out a strategy.

During one such meeting, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari categorically declared that his party would oust the incumbent AJK premier and replace him with a loyalist from within the party.

Under Article 18 of the AJK Constitution, a resolution for a vote of no-confidence against the prime minister must be moved by at least 14 members — constituting 25 per cent of the total strength of the assembly — and must include the name of the proposed successor.

Subsequently, at least 10 members from the so-called 'forward bloc' of PTI dissidents also announced their support for the PPP's planned move, enabling the party to meet the minimum requirement of 27 votes needed

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Mamdani poised to become first Muslim NYC mayor

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: A 34-year-old Muslim, South Asian-heritage candidate who identifies as a democratic socialist appeared poised to become mayor of New York City, a global symbol of diversity and immigrant influence.

By noon on Tuesday, about 1.2 million people, including early voters, had cast ballots to decide the hotly contested race between Zohran Mamdani, former governor Andrew M. Cuomo, and Curtis Sliwa.

Polls will close in the Big Apple at 9pm.

"The outcome has the potential to reshape the longstanding power structures in the city and to send a message nationally about the direction of the Democratic Party after its disastrous defeat in the presidential election last year," *The New York Times* noted.

"It comes amid a collision of local and national forces, including escalating deportation campaigns, increasing political polarization, and economic angst over the cost of living."

Voters described the stakes in stark terms. Nicholas Romano told the *NYT*, "The polarisation is massive. I'm looking for someone trying to bring us more to the centre."

Another voter, Mabintou Bagayoko, said, "I'm very anti the anti-Islamic rhetoric that's being pushed on him right now, especially coming from a

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PIA 'restores' operations amid protest

By Mohammad Asghar and Azfarul Ashfaque

RAWALPINDI/KARACHI: Amid delays and cancelled flights, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on Tuesday claimed to have restored flight operations through alternative arrangements amid a protest by its engineers who vowed "not to compromise on the safety of passengers".

On Monday night, scores of passengers were stranded at different airports due to a delay in the PIA flights, which the management attributed to a "strike" by the aircraft engineers.

The protest has been ongoing for two-and-a-half months, with engineers wearing black ribbons on their arms. On Monday night, however, they refused to issue clearance to aircraft that caused delays.

A PIA spokesperson said that in response to the strike, the management used alternative means and worked overnight to restore operations, mitigating the impact of already delayed flights on subsequent operations.

There were seven domestic and international flights which were

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ON OTHER PAGES

Pilgrims make first crossing since May war

The first batch of Indian Sikh pilgrims has crossed into Pakistan, six months after a flare-up between the two neighbours soured ties. Over 2,000 pilgrims are expected to attend the festivities of the 556th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh religion, and the main observance will be held today (Wednesday) at the Gurdwara Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib. **Page 2**

Govt to release key report ahead of IMF board meeting

Governance and Corruption Diagnostic Assessment is a structural benchmark under $7bn bailout package

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: The government has given an undertaking to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that it will publish the much-delayed Governance and Corruption Diagnostic (GCD) Assessment Report before the Fund's upcoming executive board meeting that will consider a $1.2 billion disbursement for Pakistan.

Under the $7bn Extended Fund Facility (EFF), publication of the IMF-prepared GCD report and a subsequent action plan to address governance weaknesses across federal and provincial tiers is a key structural benchmark.

The deadline, initially end-July and then reset to end-August and end-October 2025, remains unmet owing mainly to technical and factual disagreements between Pakistani authorities and the IMF team.

"We have reaffirmed the structural benchmark and, with mutual understanding with the IMF, have committed to publish the report before the [IMF executive] board meeting" later this month or early next month, an official said.

He said it was a very comprehensive exercise conducted by the technical and legal teams of the IMF in consultation with other global organisations like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Drafts were exchanged repeatedly with Pakistani counterparts — including anti-corruption bodies, the superior judiciary, investigation agencies and the finance and law ministries — to secure "the best outcome" from international expertise covering more than 100 rules, the official added.

He said there had been serious disagreements on the interpretation of rules in the local and internal context, "for the best advice and implementation plan". The official claimed the disagreement phase was now over and a final draft had been shared with IMF headquarters in Washington for a final review before publication.

The two sides are believed to have discussed reducing the time gap between the publication of the GCD Assessment Report and a resultant governance action plan based on its recommendations for reform measures to address critical governance vulnerabilities.

Earlier, the GCD report was set for publication in July and the action plan rollout was scheduled for a gap of three months by the end of October. The latter may now be rolled out before December to become subject for the next biannual review.

There are compliance gaps around asset declarations by public servants. While the overarching civil servants' law has been amended to mandate electronic filing by Grade-17 and above officials, including beneficially owned assets and those of family members, for access by relevant institutions, tax authorities and banks, implementation remains uneven.

An IMF scoping mission had visited Pakistan early this year and held

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